

STORIES FOR CHILDREN

BY WALT McDougall

Little Howard Megargee Finds a Magic Charm That Cures His Dying Father and Turns Their Enchanted Cat Into a Lovely Princess



"HELLO! WHAT DO YOU WANT?"

NE DAY Howard Megargee was sitting on the steps of the schoolhouse with Arthur Tomorrow, and the latter suddenly asked him what his father's business was. Howard, strange to say, could not tell him, for he had never known where his parent got his wealth.

"My father," said Arthur with pride, "is a general in the army, and he makes a lot of money without working at all."

"The next time I go home, I'll find out what my father is," said Howard. "The school was a boarding school and he did not go home until June, but until then he kept the matter in mind, for, after all, it's a hard thing not to know what your father's business is. When he got home he found his father sick in bed, and he said he had not long to live. He was very pale and thin and Howard was frightened as he looked at him, for his father had been a big, stout man."

"Why don't you send for the doctor?" he asked.

"Because I know more than the doctors, and they can't help me. There's only one thing that can cure me and there's no finding it in this world, I am afraid, my son."

"What is that?" asked Howard.

"A white peacock's feather," replied Mr. Megargee sadly.

"Never heard of one," Howard said. "Once there was such a bird, many ages ago, but I am afraid not a feather exists now. I've tried all my arts and I can discover no trace of it," added his father, and a big tear rolled down his cheek, for, after all, he was still too young to die, not being more than sixty-nine years old.

"Can I help you?" inquired his son.

"Alas! I fear you cannot, for you are but a boy. It took me many years to acquire even the beginning of my learning, and even now I am but a student."

"A student of what?" asked Howard.

"I am a magician," answered his father. "Howard jumped in surprise, for he had no idea that a magician could look so mild and pleasant as his father always did. He stared at him intently."

"Yes, I am one of the best," added Mr. Megargee. "But, after all, what's the use of being a magician if you can't cure a simple thing like the rheumatic gout?"

"Ha-e you 'led all your spells?' asked Howard in great awe, for he now looked at his par at with new eyes.

The Wizard's Lament

"All of them," said Mr. Megargee, "and none of them work. I find that although spells and incantations are all right when you use them on other people they are no good for your own trouble. Why, I've turned people into cats, dogs, mice, chickens and stones with some of my simplest charms, yet I can't get rid of my pain at all."

"Is-is our cat a-person?" asked the boy.

"Certainly," replied his father. "She was a princess of the land of Somnolia, whose father had me turn her into a Maltese cat because she refused to marry his Prime Minister."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Howard, as he gazed at the beautiful, sleek cat by the hearth. "Well, perhaps she thought she wouldn't make a good minister's wife. How about our dog? Is he—"

"He was a man who kept troubling me to buy books. He came to the house daily until I got tired of refusing to buy, and I got rid of him thus. He doesn't seem to mind it now, but at first he was very unpleasant, indeed."

"And has a good time," said Howard; "but now he doesn't have to work for a living. I would like to learn how to do it, so that I could change our teacher into a something."

"Not for such a purpose. To be a magician is a terribly difficult thing, and although some go into the business just to make mischief, I did not; nor would I help you for the purpose of getting square with your teacher. Some day, when you are older, I will show you some of my simple tricks, but will not make you a magician, for it is more trouble than pleasure. The life of a magician isn't what it's cracked up to be, for it's very exhausting work, indeed."

Mr. Megargee was too tired to talk any more, and soon went to sleep; but Howard was so wrought up by the conversation that he could not help looking through some of the books of magic that lay on the table, and soon he got so interested in his reading that he forgot all about his father. There were wonderful things in the book he held; of charms and spells to do all sorts of marvelous things, to help one to fly or ride a broomstick, and eat fire or walk in it, and to change winds or bring rain, or drive flocks from your fingers, and to darken the moon or to call up goblins, and so on. Finally, away at the end of the book, he found a spell that was said to be the great boss spell of all, and it was printed in such small letters that nobody but the very sharpest-eyed could read it. Howard had eyes like a microscope, however, and easily read it. It was a wishing-spell, and whoever repeated it could be anywhere or do anything he desired, it seemed, although it was evident that even this spell, powerful as it was, couldn't help his sick father. It read like this:

"ALAKAZAM BAZAZZA KI!
HICKORY DICKORY DOCK.
OMEGA OM OPEKA FI!
O DONNERWETTER HOCH!"

Howard repeated it aloud several times and then thought, "Now what shall I wish? Oh! I'll wish that father would get well right out." Then he made his wish, but nothing happened. He repeated the charm in such a loud voice that his father

woke up. "What are you doing?" he cried, in great alarm, as he heard the last words.

"I am trying to wish you well again, but it doesn't seem to work," replied his son.

"That's funny!" answered his father; "for that charm always has worked."

"It's no good now," said Howard sadly. His father then repeated the words, but it was of no use. Nothing happened at all.

"I guess I'm a has been as a conjuror," Mr. Megargee remarked, with a long sigh, "I have an idea. The thing's like a typewriter ribbon. It gets played out," said Howard. "Go! Let's say it backward!" Mr. Megargee laughed. He had just had to, for the idea seemed so foolish, but Howard uttered the spell backward.

"It sounds just as good, anyhow," he said.

Now, of course he did not know it, but the thing he did was exactly right and the spell was working and all he now had to do was to wish.

"It's time you went to bed," said his father, and Howard did as he was told, taking the magic book along with him under his coat.

He went to sleep, but after some time awoke to find the Maltese cat sitting on a chair beside the bed with her great grey eyes staring at him like lamps.

"Hello!" he said; "what do you want?"

Much to his surprise, she replied: "I was wondering what you would do now."

"Why?"

"Because, now that you have the secret you may undo all that your father has done. The spell is working. You have fallen upon the secret by saying it backward."

Howard sat up in surprise. "You don't say so? Well, then, I will try to find the white peacock feather and cure father."

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"Will you not change me back to my former shape before you do that?" she asked.

"Certainly not. How do I know that I'll have more than one chance? I'll attend to him first, and if there's any more power in the old charm I'll fix you up, I will, sure." He thought and thought, but didn't make a wish at all, for he had often read in fairy tales of how a fellow wished wrong in his excitement. But he was so mixed up after awhile sorting over in his mind the best way to do it that he forgot, and exclaimed aloud:

"I wish I could do it so that I'd have some fun while I was about it!"

Suddenly his bed soared into the air, but not so quickly that the cat could not jump upon it. It darted away and seemed to go right through the ceiling and into the night like a great bird. He looked down and saw the lights of the city fade away almost instantly. He was frightened for a moment, but suddenly remembered that he had made a wish without thinking, and it was being carried out. Then he was no longer frightened, but he was a bit angry at himself for being so careless.

"She's going like a runaway trolley car!" said he to the cat. "However, I wished I could do it and have some fun, so I guess after all it's coming out all right. If the charm's any good we may expect some adventures."

"The charm is all right. It was tried on me," said the Princess-cat.

"Let's try it again," said Howard, and repeated the words, after which he said, "I wish you were turned into a Princess again." Instantly there sat a lovely girl with hair like pure gold, smiling at him

it's having any name. It's just our place, that's all," said the old man, wonderingly.

"Where is it? In what country?" asked the Princess.

"Why, it's just here; that's all I know." "She means, where is it in the geography?" said Howard, thinking that old man was the stupidest he had ever seen.

"We never had geography to play with," replied the man. "What sort of a game is that?"

"Oh, Lord!" cried Howard. "Isn't he the very worst? Say, do you know your own name?"

"Of course," said the man, laughing. "I am Robert."

"Robert What?" asked Princess Alice.

"No, not Robert What, but Robert the Top Spinner," the aged man replied, proudly.

"You don't mean that you, an old man, spin tops?" cried the Princess.

More Queer Children

"I don't understand what you mean by an old man, but I am the best top spinner ever was," he said.

Just then several more old people came in, somewhat timidly out of the near-by houses and approached the visitors, looking at them with immense curiosity.

They spoke to Robert the Top Spinner and asked him who these new arrivals were and where they had come from.

"We are from America, and we came just to see the sights," said Alice.

They all looked as though they didn't understand, and Howard asked them if they had ever heard of America. They had not, and he found very quickly that

others had built a dam across the gutter and were sailing pieces of potato peelings on the muddy water with great delight.

"Down the street a very fat man was trying to jump a hitching post, while several others were laughing at his efforts, and at the other end of the street another man was flying a large kite. A bald-headed man was trying to hit him with a spit-ball-blower as he ran by. In front of a red house a group was collected, singing 'London bridge has fallen down,' taking no notice of Howard and Alice at all, while near them a number were busy playing with jackstones on the level ground."

"It's the most wonderful thing I ever saw!" said the princess.

"The idea of all these old sills fooling away their time like this, I guess they are all crazy; that's the only explanation I can find for such conduct."

They seem to enjoy it at any rate, replied the princess. Just then a man with great red whiskers came along on roller skates. He stopped to stare at them.

Alice asked him if he was having a good time. "Well, I just guess I am!" he answered. "I only fell down six times and now I can have the skates twice a week. I'm going to skate all the way to the store and back."

"Where is the store?" asked Howard.

"Round the corner. I'll show you if you'll buy me some candy." They followed him around the corner, and there, sure enough, was the store presided over by an old woman who laughed with glee as they came in, and who seemed to be only playing at keeping store. There were

"Three pins each," she said, giggling.

"Holly Gee!" cried the man on roller skates. "That's too much!"

"All right. One pin each," said the old woman, with another giggle.

"Do you mean to say you sell candy for pins just like children playing at keeping store?" asked Howard.

"Of course I do," answered the woman. "What else am I doing but playing at keeping store? Does it look as though this was a blacksmith's shop?"

"Well! well!" cried Howard. "This beats me! I'm all upside down!"

"Take what you wish," said the woman; "I'm tired of keeping store, and I want to go out and play ring-around-a-rosy!"

So away she went in a jiffy, and the man on skates filled his pockets with candy, grinning like a monkey all the while. He then started to go out, but slipped on the top step and sailed into the air. He came down on his nose at the foot of the steps, and began to cry. Howard ran to lift him up.

"Did you hurt yourself much?" asked Alice.

"I broke two of my popcorn balls!" he yelled, "and bit my tongue instead of the candy. If I catch that girl I'll punch her!"

"What girl?" asked Alice.

"That candy girl. The one that keeps the store."

Alice looked at Howard. "They all think that they are girls and boys!" she said. "I do wonder what's done all this!"

"I'll bet it's a charm that some wizard has put on them," said Howard.

"It must be," she replied, "and we must find some way to remedy it."

didn't even know what that meant, and they knew no more about the rest of the Howard asked them if they had in their houses any old books, and when he spoke of reading and writing he was found that no one knew what he was talking about. Some of them, he found, seemed to know their A, B, C's, but even they had no notion what the letters meant, tired and sleepy, and not a few were cross. They met the roller-skate man then and more with his face all smeared with candy. He grinned when he saw them. "Have you had any fun to-day?" he inquired.

"Some," answered Howard. "Are you going to bed now?"

"You bet I am!" the roller-skate man replied. "Most of us hurry up and get into bed afore dark so the Bugaboos can't get us, but some stay up and do so 'til they're good and scared."

"You don't really mean that you are afraid of Bugaboos?" asked Alice.

"Well, I just guess we are, all of us. You ain't never seen 'em, have you?" he asked.

"No, have you seen them?"

"I have not seen 'em, but I've heard 'em," answered the roller-skate man. "Most of the children has seen 'em. I've always cover my head up with the bedclothes at night, scared down like 'em. I never go near their place, either."

"Why, where do they live?" asked Howard.

"Over yonder, in a great vault down to the ground, if you go to the top of the hill you can see it, but I won't go with you, so there!"

"What do the Bugaboos look like?" Alice inquired.

"Oh, awful! All eyes and mouth, and they go 'Boo-oo-oo-oo-oo,' all right long, until you get so scared you can't sleep. They go up to the vault and catch us or two and see what they are like," said Howard, for, being an up-to-date boy, he was no more afraid of a Bugaboo than you are. Alice, being only a girl, was somewhat startled at the idea, but she knew he was a brave boy, and she went along cheerfully enough. The roller-skate man gave a little cry and fled into his house and under the bedclothes in a hurry. In a little while they had reached the Bugaboos' Hole and scoured down into it. A low confused sort of murmuring gobbled came from his mouth and Alice felt a slight creepy feeling as Howard began to wail. She was afraid to remain outside alone, so she followed him.

The Terrible Goblins

When they got inside a loud and startling sound greeted them and frightened her very much, but Howard said: "Humph! It's only a flock of turkeys and not Bugaboos at all!" Sure enough that was all it was. The turkeys gobbled harshly and threateningly, as all turkeys will when they are scared, but Howard waved his arms at them, and they all crowded close together against the wall. Suddenly Howard shouted:

"Look! There are peacocks, too!"

Alice looked and then she cried: "See, there is a white one! I never saw a white peacock before!"

Howard jumped toward the birds and saw the white peacock in an instant. He rushed at it and seized it by the tail. It squawked loudly and dapped its wings in the effort to escape, but he held on and in another moment found himself in his hands a great bunch of its feathers. During its struggles all the turkeys flew out of the hole, making such a loud gabling that all the people in the village fled into their houses and under the beds or the bedclothes.

When Alice and Howard got back they called all the people and told them that the Bugaboos were only turkeys. One old man said:

"I am sorry to find that out, for I do love to be scared. Now, half the fun of going to bed is lost."

So many of them agreed with this man that Howard saw that they were, in fact, real children, for you know lots of youngsters do really love to be frightened, in a sort of make-believe way.

"Now we will go straight home at once," said Howard to Princess Alice; "and can't father with the hole and I wish I could be there this minute."

In a twinkling he was at his father's bedside, but the princess was not with him, and he realized, too late, that he had not included her in his wish. His father woke, and looked at him, and when he saw the feathers he sat up.

"What shall I do with them?" asked Howard.

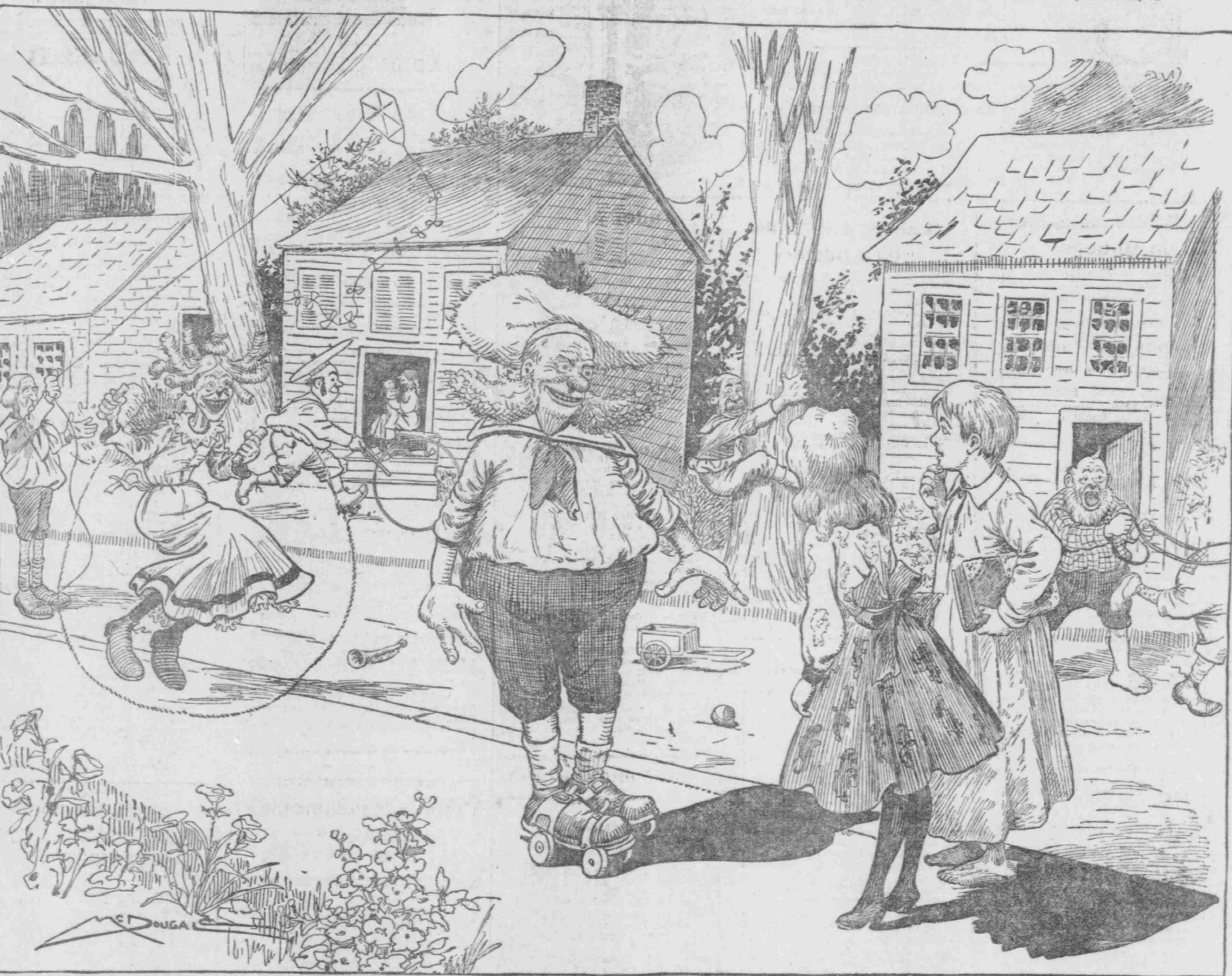
"Take one feather and burn it under my nose," said Mr. Megargee.

Howard did as he was told, and the smell was dreadful, but it cured his father at once. He sprang out of bed and dashed around. Then he looked for the cat to turn her into a princess again, he was so glad to be well again, but Howard had to tell him how he had found her. Then he turned the dog back into a book agent, who at once hurried away to catch up on his sales.

"Now," said Mr. Megargee, "let's see what we can do to find our lost princess."

But I will tell you about Princess Alice in another story.

WALT McDougall



"HAVE YOU HAD ANY FUN TO-DAY?" HE INQUIRED

woke up. "What are you doing?" he cried, in great alarm, as he heard the last words.

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"Hello!" he said; "what do you want?"

Much to his surprise, she replied: "I was wondering what you would do now."

"Why?"

through the tears of joy in her blue eyes. She gave him her hand and said: "I thank you heartily for your kindness. You are a dear, good boy, and you may kiss me."

The bed sailed along like an airship away above the clouds, so that it was impossible to tell where they were going, but after a time it dipped down and shot to the ground. It was daylight, and they found themselves in a little town where all the houses were like dolls' houses, none of them more than one story high. The streets were filled with all sorts of toys. The toys lay about everywhere, just as if all the children in the place had suddenly gone away and left them. This was the case, only the children, they soon found, were very different from any children they had ever seen. They walked about the streets and gazed at the little houses for nearly an hour, but saw nobody. Finally Howard said:

A Queer House

"Do you suppose that nobody lives here, or are they all away from town?"

"Let's go into a house and find out," said Princess Alice. "There may be some people inside."

So they went into the nearest house and saw somebody in a bed, but whoever it was he was all covered up by the bedclothes. "Hi, there!" cried Howard. "Are light, don't you know it?"

An old man peeped out from under the bedclothes with eyes wide open. "Oh, who are you? I thought it was a bogey man. Where did you come from?"

Howard told him to get up and dress while they waited outside. The old man still seemed somewhat alarmed, but did as he was told. Soon he came out dressed like a small boy, with a fluffy shirt waist and short knickerbockers. He did not comb his hair nor wash his face at all, but came as soon as he was dressed.

"What is this place?" asked Howard.

"Why, I don't know! I never heard of

they knew of no other place than their funny little town, and everything that was in it."

"What sort of people are these?" he said to Alice, as others began to appear and stare at the visitors. "They seem to think we are wonders."

As he spoke a sweet middle-aged lady approached and asked:

"Pray, tell me, are you the fairies?"

Alice laughed. Howard was disgusted and said gruffly:

"No, we are not fairies. We are just a boy and a girl, but I think we've landed in a lunatic asylum."

"Why, no, you can't be children. You are too small," said the pretty lady. "I am a girl myself. Still, perhaps in the place you come from the children may be smaller than us and dress different."

Quite a group collected around her as she spoke. Some of the people laughed heartily when they heard Howard speak. One said:

"Ha-ha, look at him. He said he was a boy. Why, he has no whiskers!"

Soon the street was filled with gaping crowds, who stared at Howard and Alice as at strange animals. It was some time before they were satisfied with asking questions, and then they all began to play in the yards and streets like so many youngsters. Some rolled hoops, others played horrie or tag or hop-scotch or mumble, while others spun tops, jumped ropes or sat down on the low doorsteps and cuddled dolls. Not one of them but was busy at play of some sort, while the air was filled with yells and shouts. It was exactly like recess hour at a school, and when Howard shut his eyes it seemed as though there were a thousand little children at play. It was only when he saw the gray beards of the men and the old faces of the women all about him that he realized they were not boys and girls. It did seem more than ridiculous to see two tottering graybeards gigglingly tying a tin can to a dog's tail and to watch the aged cronies playing with their dolls was really pitiful, but they seemed as happy as little tots all the while. Four or five very feeble and very old people were playing peekaboo among the bushes, and

heads of all sorts of candy, tops, hoops, pinwheels, dolls, toys and everything that one could think of.

"How much do you ask for that sort of candy?" asked Alice, pointing to a pile of caramels.

"Two pins apiece," the old woman replied.

"How much for the popcorn balls?" asked Howard.

"Three pins each," she said, giggling.

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"All right. One pin each," said the old woman, with another giggle.

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